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ACCOUNT

OF

A CASE

OF

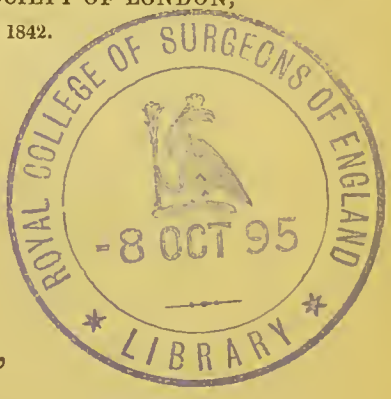
SUCCESSFUL AMPUTATION OF THE THIGH,

DURING THE

MESMERIC STATE,

WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PATIENT:

READ TO THE ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON, ON TUESDAY, THE 22ND OF NOVEMBER, 1842.



BY

W. TOPHAM, ESQUIRE,

AND

W. SQUIRE WARD, ESQRE. M. R. C. S.

(FORMERLY HOUSE SURGEON TO ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL),

LONDON:

H. BAILLIÈRE, 219, REGENT STREET.

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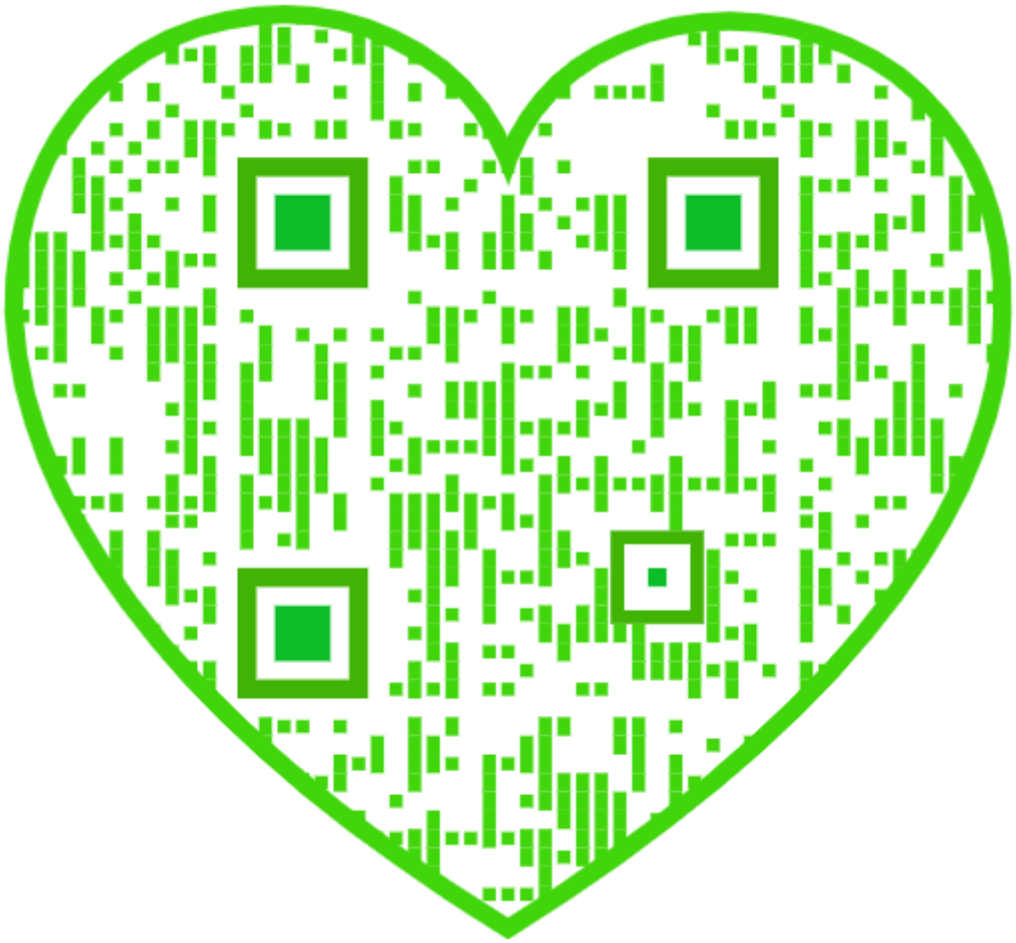

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE writer of the first part of this Account conceives some apology necessary, for intruding his name upon the public, in connection with a subject like the present:—in so wide a degree foreign to the vocation of a Barrister. He has been led to do so, from considering that his statement being, exclusively, matter of fact, any value, it might possess, would be derived, entirely, from its authenticity.

The phenomena of Mesmerism were, two years ago, first examined by him as curious; and afterwards studied, as facts, both interesting in themselves, and important in their consequences. He has since made, and witnessed, numerous experiments, with extraordinary results:—and the success of the effort, here recorded, will always induce him to look back, with gratification, upon the leisure hours, which he has devoted to Mesmerism.

MIDDLE TEMPLE,
Nov. 1842.

TO THE

ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY.

Mr. President and Gentlemen:

In detailing the circumstances attending the important case I have the honor of communicating to this learned Society, I shall abstain entirely from any preliminary remarks upon the supposed cause of the effects I have produced. I shall, still, call the state "Mesmerism:" because the term involves no principle; it regards the phenomena only; and not the specific cause for them.

Whatever the agent may be, through which the Mesmeriser influences his patient, whether by a medium,—some, or the entire portion of which, is, already, familiar to us, under another designation,—or by a medium totally new to our experience, it becomes me not now to inquire.

The generality of men, when they hear of

some novel phenomena, instead of testing *the truth* by experiment alone, endeavor to ascertain *the cause*, by their own powers of reasoning; and belief or disbelief is made to follow the result. The startling phenomena of Mesmerism have but too frequently illustrated this remark. *To facts*, I shall, therefore, confine myself; and, to such only as I can personally vouch for.

ACCOUNT OF A CASE,

ETC., ETC.

JAMES WOMBELL, aged 42, a laboring man, of a calm and quiet temperament, had suffered, for a period of about five years, from a painful affection of the left knee. On the 21st day of June last, he was admitted into the District Hospital at Wellow near Ollerton, Notts.; no longer able to work, and suffering much pain. It was soon found that amputation of the leg, above the knee-joint, was inevitable; and, it was eventually proposed, that it should be performed if possible, during mesmeric sleep.

I saw Wombell, for the first time, on the 9th of September. He was sitting upright, upon a bed in the hospital; the only position which he could bear. He complained of great pain, from his knee, and of much excitability and loss of strength, from his constant restlessness and de-

privation of sleep; for he had not, during the three previous weeks, slept more than two hours in seventy.

In the first attempt to mesmerise him, which occupied me thirty-five minutes, the only effect produced was a closing of the eyelids, with that quivering appearance, peculiar to mesmeric sleep; and, though awake and speaking, he could not raise them, until after the lapse of a minute and a half.

My attempt, the next day, was more successful, and in twenty minutes he was asleep. I continued to mesmerise him every day, except the 18th, until the 24th of September: his susceptibility gradually increasing, so that, on the 23rd, the sleep was produced in four minutes and a half. The duration of this sleep varied: continuing, generally, for half an hour; sometimes, for an hour; and, occasionally, for an hour and a half. But, with two exceptions (attempts to converse with him), I invariably found him awakened, though without being startled, by the violent pain from his knee; which suddenly recurred at uncertain intervals.

The third time I saw him, he was suffering great agony, and distressed even to tears. I commenced by making passes, longitudinally, over the diseased knee : in five minutes, he felt comparatively easy; and, on proceeding further to mesmerise him, at the expiration of ten minutes more, he was sleeping like an infant. Not only his arms were then violently pinched, but, also the diseased leg itself; without his exhibiting any sensation : yet this limb was so sensitive to pain, in his natural state, he could not bear even the lightest covering to rest upon it. That night, he slept seven hours without interruption.

After constantly mesmerising him for ten or twelve days, a great change was observed in his appearance. The hue of health returned; he became cheerful; felt much stronger; was easier, both in mind and body; slept well; and recovered his appetite.

On the 22nd of September, he was first apprised of the necessity of an early amputation. The communication seemed almost unexpected; and affected him considerably. I, this day, tried the experiment of mesmerising him against his will; proceeding by contact with the hands,

charging him, particularly, to exert his mind to prevent my affecting him. During the process, he occasionally glanced at those near him ; moving his eyes as he felt inclined, and, in twelve minutes and a half, passed into mesmeric sleep. The two or three previous days, it had been effected in six minutes. He informed me, subsequently, he had repeatedly called to mind the intelligence just received, and the torture which he must endure ; but he soon found the influence irresistible, and presently lost all consciousness. The anticipated loss of his limb, however, that night, destroyed his *natural* sleep. Next day, though found still fretting, restless, and in consequent pain, he was yet, by my touch, asleep in four minutes and a half.

I was then absent, and did not see Wombell until the 28th. He was looking healthy and cheerful ; his natural sleep was sound and regular ; and his pain soothed and diminished. I was, now, convinced that the operation might be safely attempted, during mesmeric sleep, and, with the man's firm consent, it was fixed for the Saturday following.

On the morning of Saturday, the 1st of Oc-

tober, I again mesmerised Wombell, having done so the two previous days. This was done in the presence of Mr. William Squire Ward, of Wellow, (the operator), and two other surgeons; in order that the previous mesmerism might tend, as I believed it would, to render his sleep deeper, when again mesmerised for the operation: and also to satisfy them of the state in which he would be, when that time arrived.

He slept an hour; and was roused, by an attempt to converse with him. I, then, shewed them my power of affecting any one of his limbs, even when he was quite awake. At my request, he extended his arms, alternately. By making two or three passes over each, without any contact, I so transfixed them, that, from the shoulders to the tips of the fingers, they became as rigid and unyielding as bars of iron, not to be unbent, except by mechanical force, powerful enough to injure the limbs; and yet, instantly, relaxing throughout, and dropping to his side, from the effect of my breath alone. His right leg was affected in the same degree; and relief from immediate pain was frequently afforded, by

making similar passes over the diseased one. Though the sensibility to pain was diminished, in the limbs thus affected, whilst awake, it was only, during mesmeric sleep, I found it totally gone.

At half-past one o'clock, we proceeded to Wombell's room, to make the necessary arrangements. From the suffering inflicted by the slightest movement, it was found impossible, without needless torture, to place him upon a table. The low bed, on which he then lay, was therefore lifted upon a temporary platform. Ten minutes after being mesmerised, he was drawn, by means of the bed-clothes beneath him, towards the end of the bed. The movement, however, excited that pain, which had so often aroused him before; and now it did so again. There was something quite excruciating in the suffering which the state of the knee produced; for, I had seen him, whilst in mesmeric sleep, pricked to some little depth, in other parts of the diseased limb, without being disturbed or conscious of it. To preclude the necessity of any further movement, his leg was now placed in the most convenient position which he could bear. Shortly

afterwards, he declared that the pain had ceased; and I again mesmerised him, in four minutes. In a quarter of an hour, I informed Mr. Ward that he might commence the operation. I then brought two fingers of each hand gently in contact with Wombell's closed eyelids; and there kept them, still further to deepen the sleep. Mr. Ward, after one earnest look at the man, slowly plunged his knife into the centre of the outer side of the thigh, directly to the bone; and then made a clear incision, round the bone, to the opposite point, on the inside of the thigh. The stillness, at this moment, was something awful: the calm respiration of the sleeping man alone was heard; for all other seemed suspended. In making the second incision, the position of the leg was found more inconvenient than it had appeared to be; and the operator could not proceed with his former facility. Soon after the second incision, a moaning was heard from the patient, which continued, at intervals, until the conclusion. It gave me the idea of a troubled dream; for his sleep continued as profound as ever. The placid look of his countenance never

changed for an instant; his whole frame rested, uncontrolled, in perfect stillness and repose; not a muscle or nerve was seen to twitch. To the end of the operation, including the sawing of the bone, securing the arteries, and applying the bandages,—occupying a period of upwards of twenty minutes,—he lay like a statue. Soon after the limb was removed, his pulse becoming low, from the loss of blood, some brandy and water was poured into his throat; which he swallowed unconsciously. As the last bandage was applied, I pointed out, to one of the surgeons and another gentleman present, that peculiar quivering of the closed eyelids, already alluded to. Finally, when all was completed, and Wombell was about to be removed, his pulse being still found very low, some sal volatile and water was administered to him: it proved too strong and pungent, and he gradually and calmly awoke.

At first, he uttered no exclamation; and, for some moments, seemed lost and bewildered: but, after looking around, he exclaimed, "I bless the Lord to find it's all over!" He was

then removed to another room; and, following immediately, I asked him in the presence of those assembled, to describe all he felt or knew, after he was mesmerised. His reply was, "*I never knew anything more; and never felt any pain at all: I, once, felt as if I heard a kind of crunching.*" I asked if that were painful? He replied, "*No pain at all! I never had any; and knew nothing, till I was awakened by that strong stuff*" (the sal volatile). The "crunching," no doubt, was the sawing his own thigh bone. He was left, easy and comfortable; and still found so, at nine o'clock that night: about which hour, I again mesmerised him (in a minute and three quarters), and he slept an hour and a half. I may further add that, on the Monday following, the first dressing of his wound was in mesmeric sleep. Of this dressing, usually accompanied by much soreness and smarting, he felt nothing; slept long after it was completed; was ignorant of Mr. Ward's intention; and, after awakening, remained unconscious of its having been done.

Mr. W. S. Ward's own valuable statement, in accordance with his personal observation and

care, prior and subsequent to the operation, he has kindly permitted to be appended to my own; and, thus, to render complete the narrative of this case: which I leave, without a syllable of comment.

W. Topham.

Middle Temple,
Oct. 25*th*, 1842.

Mr. President and Gentlemen:

Being a party concerned, in offering the present paper, for reading, before your learned Society, I feel that, as a member of your own profession, and the operator alluded to, in the preceding pages, some observations are due from me, in addition to those already brought before you, by my friend, Mr. Topham.

The circumstances, under which the operation was performed, are of so novel a nature, that they may afford much ground for discussion; if the members of the profession, to whom I have the honor of addressing these observations, will calmly deliberate upon them; and, without prejudice, examine the subject, which (should further experience confirm the anticipations that may reasonably be entertained, from the happy result of the present trial) holds out such a boon to the surgeon; whose province it is, and whose

study it has, for ages, been, to mitigate the poignant sufferings that "flesh is heir to."

The case, to which the attention of the Society has been already called, was one of very extensive ulceration of the cartilages of the knee-joint, of four and a half years standing: the consequence of neglected inflammation of the synovial membrane; produced by injury, which was treated by a quack, in the first instance, but did not come under my own notice, until about three years before his admission into the District Hospital, at Wellow; when, supposing ulceration to have commenced in the cartilages, I ordered absolute rest, and the usual treatment; which was only adhered to for ten days; when, in spite of every remonstrance on my part, he returned to his ordinary employment (an agricultural laborer), in his still crippled state.

He then fell into the hands of other practitioners, whose discipline was less rigid, and whose prognosis was more sanguine than mine. I frequently met him, and occasionally warned him of the eventual loss of his limb, if he persisted in using it. His last fair prospect was a

promised cure by cupping, but this having produced no relief, he applied for admission into the hospital. At this time the disease had far advanced; the slightest motion of the joint was attended by the most excruciating agony; his nights were almost wholly sleepless, in consequence of the painful startings of the limb; his pulse weak and rapid; his face constantly marked with a hectic flush; his tongue foul, and appetite gone. He was now confined to his bed, but could not bear a horizontal position. The joint was supported by a light splint; poultices, fomentations, &c., were applied; attention paid to his general health; opiates, quinine, wine, &c., prescribed to get him into a fit state for the operation (which I deemed inevitable), *without any apparent benefit:* but, on hearing that Mr. Topham was coming into the neighborhood, I determined to request him to try the effects of Mesmerism upon him; with a view, not only of tranquillising the system, prior to the operation, but, if possible to procure such a degree of insensibility to pain, as to render the man unconscious of the operation itself: having long desired to see THIS accom-

plished, as the "summum bonum" of Mesmerism.

I was, however, obliged to leave home, from indisposition, at this period; but daily received reports of the progress made upon my patient: and, on my return, on the 27th of September,—about three weeks after the commencement of the Mesmerism,—I was as much astonished as I was delighted, to observe the improved condition of the man. He had, now, much more the hue of health; his nights were more quiet and tranquil; his appetite had returned; and, in fact, such was his state, that had I not known the previous history of the case, much doubt must have arisen, in my mind, as to the propriety of, immediately, amputating the limb. It is true, there was, still, the pain, on the slightest movement of the joint; and, still, some of the same painful startings at night; but he no longer appeared to be suffering in his general health, which, on the contrary, was greatly improved: nevertheless, I felt assured, notwithstanding all this in his favor, that there was too much disease to admit of a final recovery.

As I had quite determined upon not attempting to remove the limb, while the patient was under mesmeric influence, unless I was convinced of its safety, and had opportunities of seeing him in that state; and, moreover, not without the man's own full concurrence; on the 29th, I requested Mr. Topham to mesmerise him; when I was delighted to find his susceptibility so great. When asleep (if I may use the term), his breathing was unaltered; his pulse tranquil, and about 80; his waking was slow and gradual, and without the least start; and, I found, he was insensible to the prick of a pin.

Under such circumstances, I saw no grounds for fear or hesitation; and having obtained the patient's consent, or, rather, at his own urgent request, I fixed the following Saturday, 1st of October, for the performance of the operation.

The patient (as has been already stated) was lifted, with his bed, upon a platform; and, although he was considerably excited, by hearing the cries of another patient, upon whom I had been performing a tedious and painful operation

in an adjoining room, he was soon put into mesmeric sleep: but, as I wished him to be placed in the usual position, with the limbs extended over the end of the bed, an attempt was made to draw him down with the bed-clothes; but this occasioned so much pain, as to awake him. I was, now, somewhat embarrassed; as his position on the bed, with his extremity lying in close contact with it, was so very unfavorable to the operator; but, having proceeded thus far, I was unwilling to mar the first attempt at lessening the horror and pain of a capital operation; although, I must confess, I was by no means sanguine of success. The patient was again put to sleep; previously to which, a surgeon present raised the limb about two inches from the mattress, by resting the heel upon his shoulder and supporting the joint with his hand; promising also, if the man should awake, instantly to draw him down, so as to allow the leg to extend beyond the edge of the bed.

In a few minutes, Mr. Topham said he was quite ready; when, having adjusted the tourniquet (the very unfavorable position of the patient

precluding the possibility of otherwise compressing the artery), I proceeded to perform the operation, as has been described. Having made the anterior flap, without the slightest expression of consciousness on the part of the patient, I was under the necessity of completing the posterior one, in three stages. First, by dividing a portion of the flap on the inside; then a similar portion on the outside. This proceeding (which of course was far more tedious and painful than the ordinary one) was rendered necessary, to enable me to pass the knife through, under the bone, and thus complete the whole; as I could not sufficiently depress the handle to do so, without the two lateral cuts.

Beyond what has been already so well described by Mr. Topham, I need only add, that the extreme quivering or rapid action of the divided muscular fibres *was less than usual;* nor was there so much contraction of the muscles themselves: I must also notice, that, two or three times, I *touched the divided end of the sciatic nerve, without any increase of the low moaning,*

described by Mr. Topham; and which, to all present, gave the impression of a disturbed dream.

The patient is doing remarkably well; and sat up on Sunday last, to eat his dinner,—just three weeks from the operation; and he has not had a single bad symptom: none, even of the nervous excitement, so frequently observed in patients who have undergone painful operations, and who have suffered much previous anxiety, in making up their minds.

On dissection of the joint, the appearances fully verified my diagnosis. The cartilages of the tibia, femur, and patella, had been entirely absorbed, except a much-thinned layer, partly covering the patella. There was deep, carious ulceration of the exposed ends of the bones; and especially on the inner condyle of the femur; which had wholly lost its rounded shape. Some coagulated lymph was effused upon the surface of the synovial membrane, in several places; and the joint contained a certain quantity of dark-colored pus.

It is not my intention to trespass further upon

the valuable time of the Society, by presuming to stand forward as the champion of Mesmerism generally: a task to which I feel myself to be totally incompetent. For a long time, I had been a sceptic; and, long, a "cui bono" querist: when, through the kindness of Dr. Elliotson, a few months ago, I was allowed an opportunity of examining for myself, the power of that agent in producing coma; in rendering rigid the muscles; and in causing, to a certain extent, insensibility to pain. I saw, and was convinced, that my opposition was ill-founded; and the result of this conviction has been the present successful and flattering trial; which is a sufficient answer to those who are incredulous, only, as to any benefit to be derived from it: for there can be very few, now, even of the most bigoted objectors, who will venture to deny its powers in producing coma. This, too, in the calmest temperament; not merely, according to the frequent supposition, in the highly nervous young female, but, even to *utter insensibility*, in an agricultural laborer, aged 42: to which class, I need scarcely add, nervous excitement, in the

common acceptation of the term, is almost an entire stranger.

Be it observed, also, so complete was the susceptibility, that coma was quickly produced, under the most unfavorable circumstances: as, when in extreme pain from his disease; when using his own volition, to the utmost, to counteract it; and when on the table, with the fear of the operation before his eyes.

Although the single experiment, we have detailed to the Society, is scarcely sufficient to set the question completely at rest; is it *not* of a sufficiently encouraging nature, to demand an immediate repetition, by those of my professional brethren, to whom the splendid institutions of the metropolis offer such frequent opportunities?

W. Squire Ward

Wellow, near
Ollerton, Notts.
October 29*th*, 1842.